ANALize Your Mac: 20 Tips

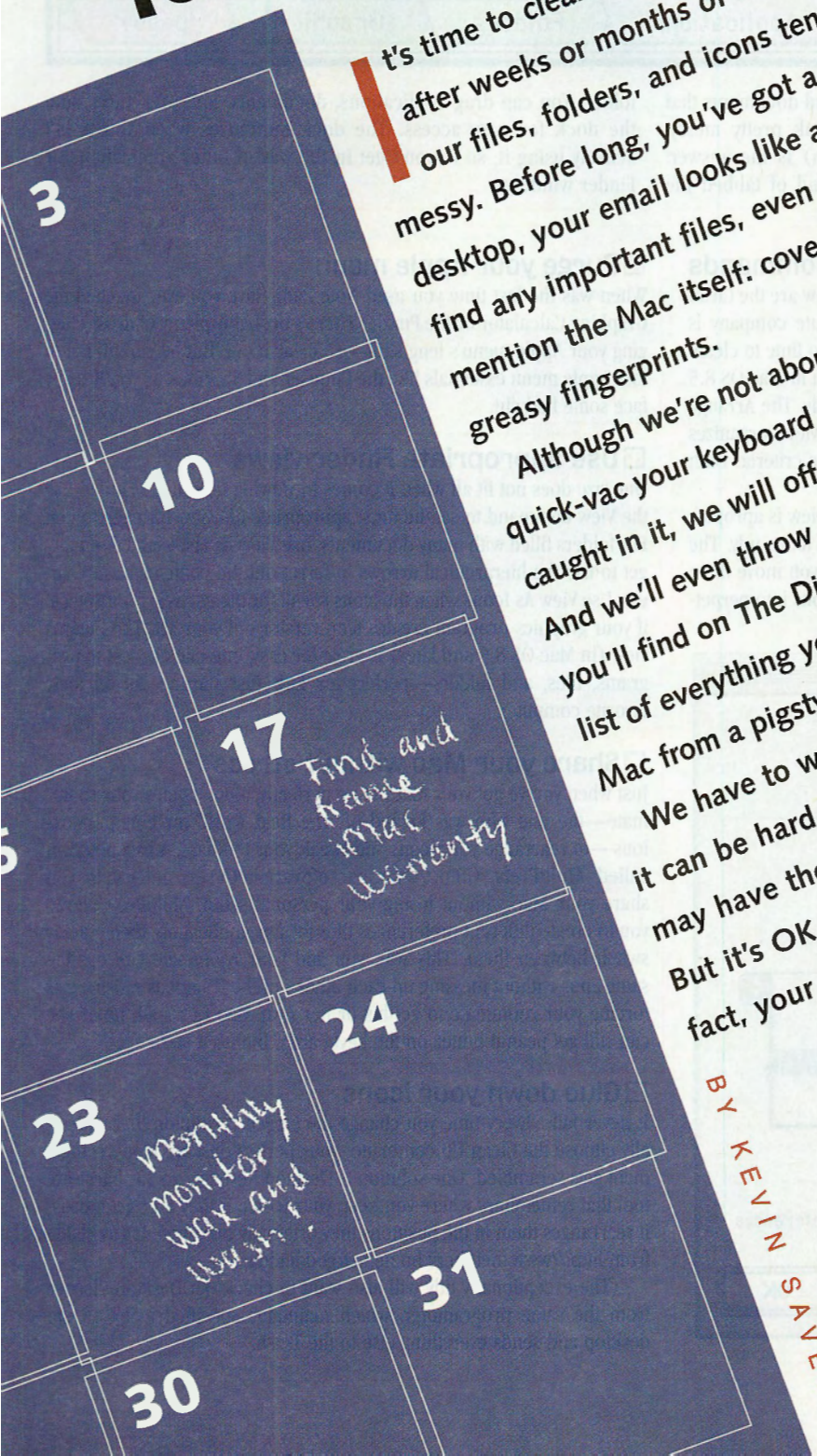
20 Tips for Straightening up Your Messy Mac

It's time to clean up the clutter. We all know too well that after weeks or months of working and playing at our Macs, our files, folders, and icons tend to get more than a little messy. Before long, you've got a dozen aliases scattered on the desktop, your email looks like a bomb hit it, and you can't find any important files, even with Sherlock's help. Not to mention the Mac itself: covered with dust and smudged, greasy fingerprints.

Although we're not about to come to your house and quick-vac your keyboard to get rid of all the cat hair caught in it, we will offer help in the form of advice. And we'll even throw in some useful software that you'll find on The Disc. In fact, we've made a check-list of everything you need to do to transform your Mac from a pigsty to a virtual clean room.

We have to warn you, though—once you start, it can be hard to stop. Before too long, you may have the cleanest computer around. But it's OK to get a little obsessive—in fact, your Mac will thank you for it.

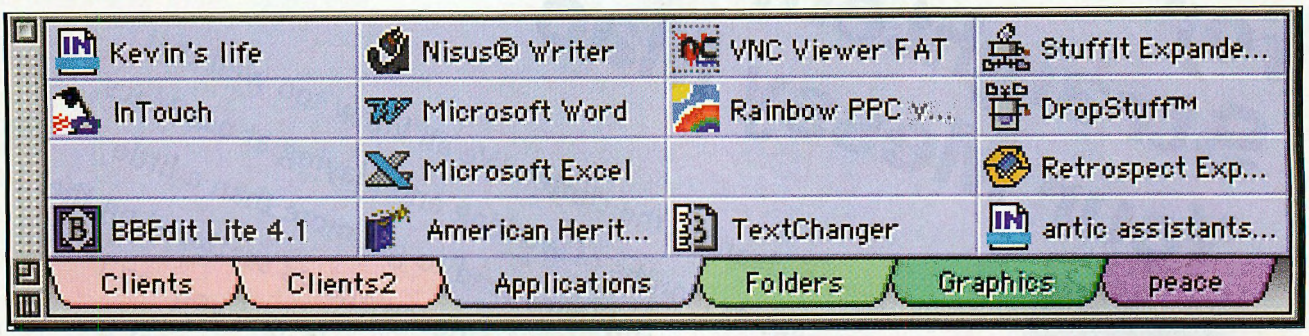
BY KEVIN SAVETZ



FIND A BUTTLOAD of anal software on The Disc!

Fastidious Finder

☑Unclutter your desktop

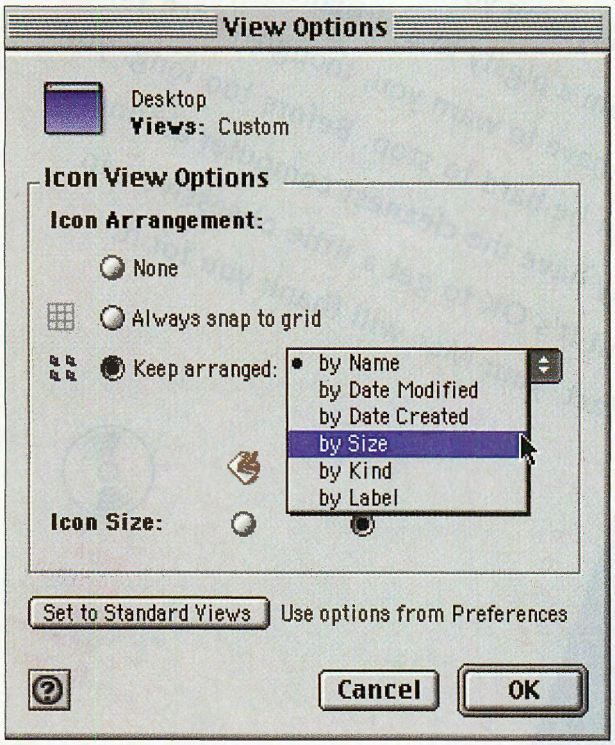


Keeping aliases on your desktop to applications and documents that you use frequently is efficient, but they can look pretty messy. DragThing ($15, http://www.recurringdream.com) is the answer. This program creates an onscreen "dock," a kind of tabbed file folder. You can drag applications, documents, and even URLs onto the dock for easy access. The dock minimizes when you aren't actively using it, so it won't get in the way of other applications or Finder windows.

☑Use the Clean Up and Arrange commands

The two quickest ways to a presentable Finder window are the Clean Up and Arrange commands—ideal when last-minute company is coming over to use your Mac and you simply have no time to clean. In icon view, choose Clean Up (under the View menu in Mac OS 8.5 and later) to straighten up your sloppy icons quickly. The Arrange command (it's called Sort List if the window is in List view) organizes a window's files by name, kind, date, size, or other criteria. Both commands work on desktop icons, too.

On the desktop and in windows where the icon view is apropos, the Finder's View Options command can keep your icons tidy. The Always Snap To Grid option keeps icons aligned as you move them around. The Keep Arranged function forces those icons into perpetual order with military precision.



☑Purge your Apple menu

When was the last time you used Note Pad? Have you ever touched the Graphing Calculator or the Puzzle? There's probably plenty of dross clogging your Apple menu's feng shui—so clear it out. But be careful not to toss Apple menu essentials like the Chooser and Sherlock or you'll really face some bad chi.

☑Use appropriate Finder views

One size does not fit all when it comes to viewing files in the Finder. Use the View command to set the most appropriate file view for each folder. For folders filled with many documents, use View As List—and don't forget to use the hierarchical arrows to ferret out the contents of subfolders. Use View As Icons when the icons speak for themselves: for instance, if your graphics program creates icon versions of your art. The Buttons view (in Mac OS 8.5 and later) is great for easy, one-click access to programs, files, and folders—perfect for kids just starting out on their favorite computer.

☑Share your Mac without stress

Just when you've got your Mac set up perfectly, along comes your roommate—the one who was kicked off The Real World for being obnoxious—to rearrange your icons and tweak your toolbars. A free program called MultiPrefs (http://www.macsoftware.net/users/mjh) lets you share your Mac without losing your personal setup. MultiPrefs allows you to create different preferences files for any application, then quickly switch between them. This way, you and your roommate can use the same apps without messing up each other's prefs. It's not as satisfying as forcing your roommate to get his or her own Mac (after all, he or she can still get peanut butter on the keyboard), but it's a start.

☑Glue down your icons

It never fails: Every time you change the screen resolution or accidentally choose the Clean Up command, your perfect desktop icon arrangement gets scrambled. One solution is Desktop Resetter, a $10 shareware tool that remembers where you keep your icons. If they ever get moved, it rearranges them in the positions they originally occupied. It's available from http://www.members.home.net/goddfadda.

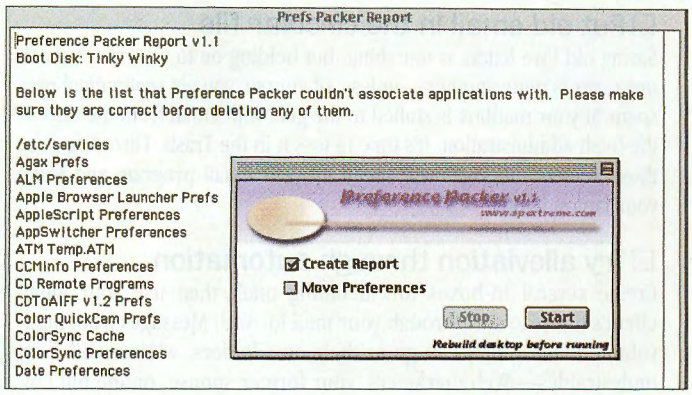
(The exceptionally tidy will also want to check out Desktop Cleaner from the same programmer, which maintains specified icons on the desktop and sends everything else to the Trash.)

Files and Folders

☑ Pick and choose your preferences carefully

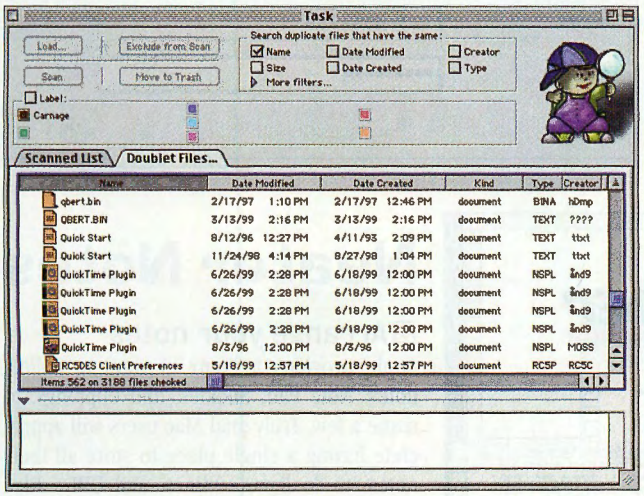
Remember when your nephew visited in the summer of '97 and played Putt Putt Hits Puberty on your Mac? Even though you erased the program as soon as he left, chances are its preferences file, and those of hundreds of other forgotten programs, are still hibernating in your Preferences folder.

You can remove them yourself, attaining a Zen-like state and freeing up bytes at a time by trashing unneeded preferences files one by one. Or you can use Preference Packer, a simple tool that locates preference files whose applications no longer exist. It can simply list the offending files or it can move them out of the Preferences folder altogether. Preference Packer is a $10 shareware program available from http://www.spextreme.com.



☑ Trash the twins

How many copies of SimpleText are hiding on your hard drive? Whether you want to know or not, Doublet Scan ($25, http://www.workingnet.com/hyperbolic) can tell you. This program will scan your hard drive for duplicate files, including applications, plug-ins, even text files. When it finds a duplicate file, a click of the mouse punts the offender to the Trash.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Scan
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Quick Start 8/12/96 12:27 PM 4/11/93 2:09 PM document TEXT ttxt
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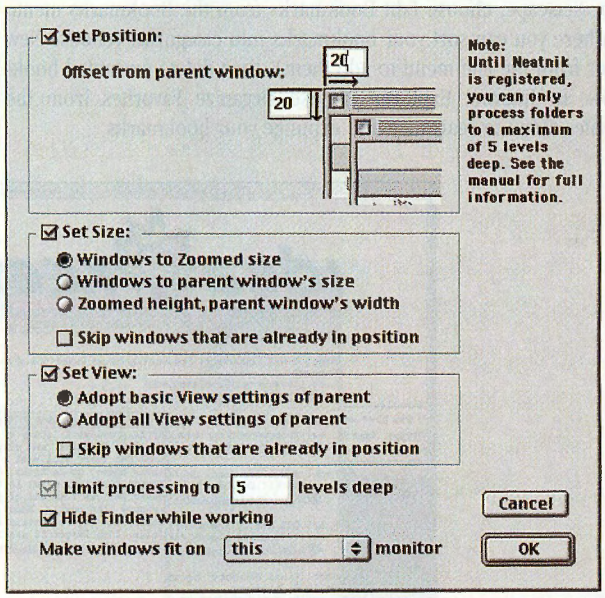
Items 562 on 3188 files checked

☑ Be a Neatnik

Obsessive neat freaks will appreciate Neatnik, a shareware tool ($10, http://www.ironsoftware.com) that tidies up your folder windows. The utility can set the position, size, and view options for several folders at once, even for all of the folders on your Mac in one fell swoop. You can easily set the view characteristics, as well as the size and position attributes, of a batch of folders based upon the characteristics of their parent folder.


Set Position:
Offset from parent window:
20
20
Note: Until Neatnik is registered, you can only process folders to a maximum of 5 levels deep. See the manual for full information.
Set Size:
Windows to Zoomed size
Windows to parent window's size
Zoomed height, parent window's width
Skip windows that are already in position
Set View:
Adopt basic View settings of parent
Adopt all View settings of parent
Skip windows that are already in position
Limit processing to 5 levels deep
Hide Finder while working
Make windows fit on this monitor
Cancel
OK

Filtering Out the Crap

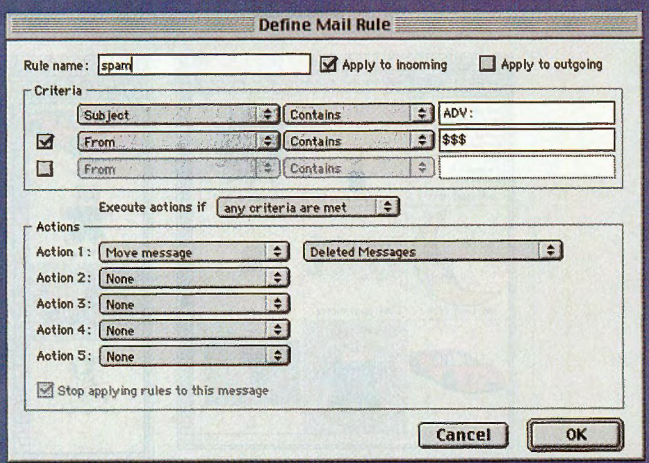
Use filters to make your email program sort through your messages before you do. This can be a great way to move unimportant messages (for instance, those from mailing lists) to a special folder, or to dump spam in the Trash. Here's how to set up a filter in Outlook Express:

1. Choose Mail Rules from the Tools menu. Press New to create a filter.

2. Select the Apply To Incoming check box, since you'll be filtering incoming mail. Give your filter a descriptive name.

3. Enter the filtering criteria—you can filter based on the subject, sender, body text, or other criteria. The filter activates when email meets any of these presets.

4. What should happen to these filtered messages? You could move them to a special folder, or highlight messages from important people in red. In this example, messages that are clearly spam—those with "ADV:" in the subject line or "$$$" in the From field—are unceremoniously trashed.



Immaculate Internet

☑Put old email in the circular file

Saving old love letters is one thing, but holding on to yesterday's email messages is quite another—unless, of course, you get sentimental over spam. If your mailbox is stuffed to the gills with email from the days of the Bush administration, it's time to toss it in the Trash. Throwing away those ancient messages will speed up your email program and make your laptop lighter.

☑Try alleviation through automation

Create several in-boxes for incoming mail, then use your email client's filters to sort through your mail for you. Messages from high-volume mailing lists can go to their own folders, while email from undesirables—Web marketers, your former spouse, online bill collectors—goes straight to the Trash. (If you use Eudora, choose Filters from the Special menu; if you prefer Outlook Express, select Mail Rules from the Tools menu.)

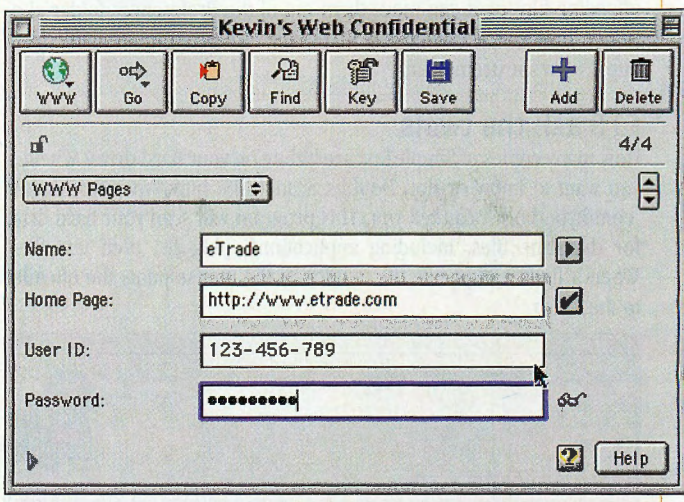
☑Do something about all those bookmarks

Your browser's Add Bookmark or Add Page To Favorites function is a quick way to file a URL for future use, but it leaves your marked sites an unorganized mess. Fortunately, both Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer have handy functions for clearing up this chaos.

In Netscape, choose Edit Bookmarks from the Bookmarks menu: from here you can sort your bookmarks into categories (choose New Folder from the File menu to add them), then delete unwanted bookmarks. In Internet Explorer, choose Organize Favorites from the Favorites menu to rearrange and expunge your bookmarks.

☑File your Web site passwords

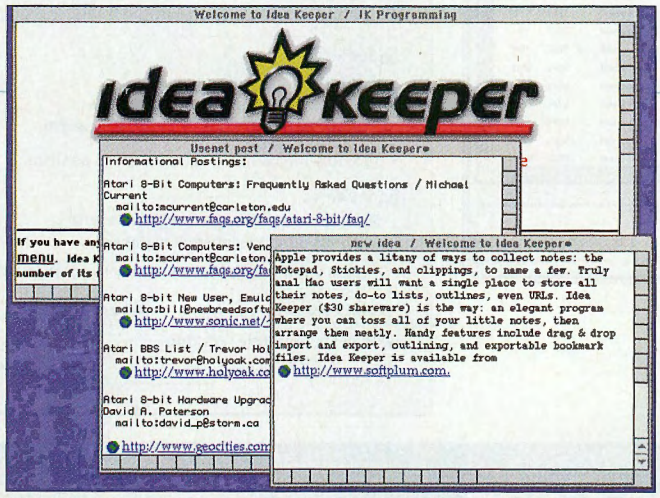
If you're a typical Web surfer, you probably have accounts and passwords on a dozen different sites: Web email accounts, auction sites, online banks...the list goes on. It's impossible to remember all of those passwords, and sticking notes on your monitor is a step backward in our goal of achieving cleanliness. Instead, try Web Confidential, a shareware tool ($25, http://www.web-confidential.com) that will store all your passwords and encrypt them, too. It uses an intuitive card-file metaphor and plays nicely with your favorite Internet applications.



Neater Notes

☑Arrange your notes

Apple provides a litany of ways to collect notes: Note Pad, Stickies, and Clippings, to name a few. Truly anal Mac users will appreciate having a single place to store all their notes, to-do lists, outlines, and URLs. Idea Keeper ($30, http://www.softplum.com) is the way to go: an elegant program where you can toss all of your little notes, then arrange them neatly, saving you many sleepless nights. Handy features include drag-and-drop import and export, outlining, and exportable bookmark files.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idea keeper
Usenet post / Welcome to Idea Keeper
Informational Postings:
Atari 8-Bit Computers: Frequently Asked Questions / Michael Current
mailto:mcurrent@carleton.edu
http://www.faqs.org/faqs/atari-8-bit/faq/
new idea / Welcome to Idea Keeper
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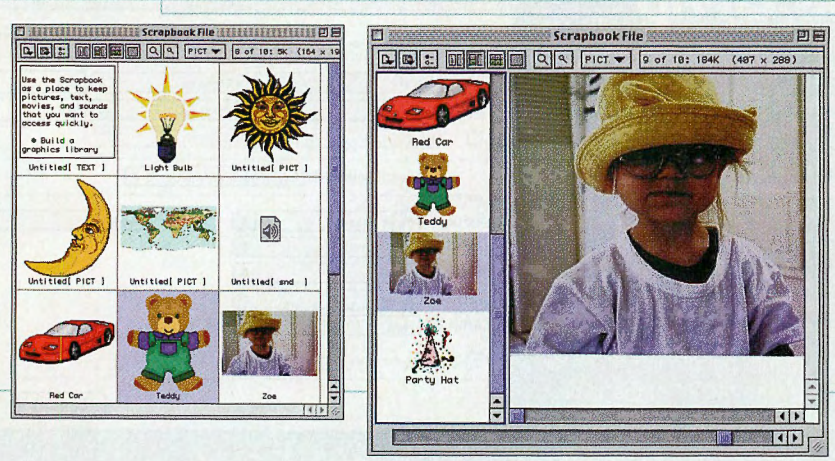
http://www.softplum.com.

☑Straighten your Scrapbook

When was the last time you cleaned out your Scrapbook? It's a pigsty! It's easy to keep the Scrapbook organized with ScrapIt Pro, a shareware program ($20, http://www.northcoast.com/~jvholder) that is 200 percent sexier than Apple's plain-vanilla Scrapbook. You can name items and view them by name or in a nifty gallery mode. And why didn't Apple think of putting a Find command in its Scrapbook? You won't know how you lived without it.



Macnificent Mac

☑Sweep and dust

Now that you've tidied up the files and folders in your Mac, it's time to scrape the dirt off it. There's no handy shareware available for this—a damp cloth and some elbow grease is all you need to remove the grime from the exterior of your beloved computer and components. Put a splash of vinegar-water solution on a lint-free cloth to clean the monitor glass without leaving streaks. You may want to unplug your Mac and open the case (if you have a Mac that opens easily, that is—don't try this on an iMac) to remove the dust that invariably collects inside. A variety of tiny vacuum cleaners, available from electronics stores, can suck the muck from your Mac.

☑Organize your archives

Isn't it time to tame those towering piles of CD-ROMs, bulging boxes of floppies, and stacks of unlabeled Zip disks? Grab a pen and make notes about what's on those disks. Maybe it's time to toss those System 6 install disks and other Stone Age software. Burn a few greatest-hits CD-ROMs and get rid of the rest.

☑Out with the old, in with the new

So your cleaning spree has uncovered a forgotten 14.4 modem, a dusty Mac Classic, and mounds of one-version-ago software. Instead of taking it all to the dump, consider donating your old hardware and software to a school or nonprofit community group. The Pep National Directory of Computer Recycling Programs at http://www.microweb.com/pepsite/Recycle/recycle_index.html can locate a worthy organization in your state. You'll not only feel good about yourself, but also have room for all those new DVD titles you've been coveting.

☑Cow-tie your cables

Now it's time to tidy up behind your Mac. How can you sleep knowing that tangled mess of cables is winding its way around? Use twist-ties—the large kind that come with big garbage bags—to bundle cables together. Reusable, color-coded velcro strips are commercially available and very effective. The extraordinarily anal can run their cables through flexible plastic conduit, keeping wires neat and out of sight.

☑Put your records in order

The old joke says that something will go wrong with your computer the day after the warranty expires. Actually, if something goes wrong, it will be two days *before* the warranty expires, but you'll be unable to find any proof of when you bought it. Prepare for the worst by filing the sales receipts away. Find a file folder—an actual, real, paper-based one. In it, stuff the receipts for every hardware and software item you own. If you have equipment repaired, put the receipt and warranty for the repair job in there, too. You'll have a complete record of your computer system. This is handy in case it is stolen, you decide to sell it, or the warranty deadline is looming.

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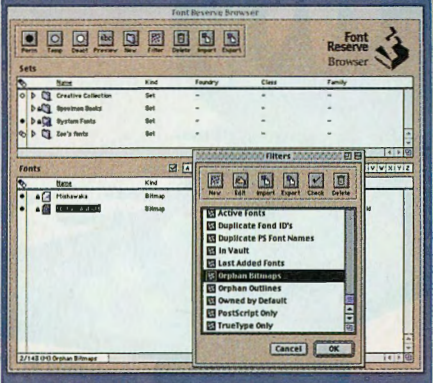
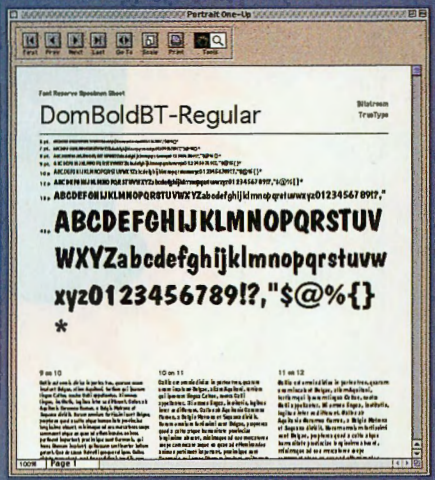
Font Fixer-Upper

A messy Fonts folder is more than ugly. Having too many fonts installed at once can slow down applications and lead to migraine-inducing font conflicts. A font management program like Font Reserve can prevent your fonts from taking over your System Folder and ruining your life. A free, working demo of Font Reserve, which can organize up to 100 fonts, is available from http://www.fontreserve.com. The complete version, which can wrangle tens of thousands of fonts, costs $89.95 ($119.95, if you want the CD and manual).

First, drag all of your fonts into Font-Reserve's browser window. The program creates a database of your fonts, enabling you to activate and deactivate each one on the fly. At this point, you can remove all the fonts from the Fonts folder (in your System folder) except Charcoal, Chicago, Monaco, and Geneva.

Use the filter to find the fonts you need by name. Using the Filter menu, you can seek out problem fonts, such as those with orphaned bitmaps and duplicate Fond IDs. You can also organize your fonts into sets, if you wish.



When you can't remember what a font looks like, view or print a specimen sheet (choose from several in the Specimen menu). In the Preview window, you can see technical info about the font, kerning data, a character map, and other information.